

K. SZABÓ

WORLD CONCEPT AND FORM IN THE LYRICAL POETRY OF YANNIS RITSOS

When, on the 10th of June 1975, the Aristotle University of Saloniki conferred an honorary degree on the poet, Professor Yorgos Savvidis, in his festal appreciation, attempted to define succinctly in ten headings the significance of Ritsos' oeuvre and its novelty in the history of Greek literature. In his opinion, Ritsos's poetry

1. has attested that the quantity and quality of a poet's output are not incompatible concepts (the oeuvre produced thus far amounts to 70 volumes and upwards, some 3000 pages);

2. has shown conclusively that a social and political poetry is not necessarily confined to satirical negation or a topical slogan-like quality;

3. has, by virtue of its factuality combined with a singular visual and tactual sensitivity, led the poet to the description of thousands of images, objects, gestures, and moments of everyday life; a description which would be all but prose, were it not for the emotional emphasis given to it by the author, which suggests that this description comprehends the whole life and the whole universe;

4. has, through its openness to human problems, led him to such a simplification and condensation of the diction as does not impoverish the language, and yet makes the poem easy to understand;

5. has bridged over the problem of silence as a transitional element: now through the emphasis of doubt now through flashing the dramatic antitheticality, through the self-defence of irony, and chiefly through verbal restructuring of silence itself;

6. has decided that the lyrical poetry of his first master, Kostas Kariotakis (1896 – 1928) was not a blind alley of traditionnal poetry, but a heroic endeavour conducive to the new one;

7. has, gradually assimilating the organic elements of surrealism, given once again social dimensions and new human contents to the most revolutionary literary trend of our century;

8. has — chiefly in his great synthetical poems (reviding the form of the dramatic monologue and that of the choral song) — revealed a dialectics of opposites which the poet, in his own apocalypticity, has labelled as the "fourth dimension";

9. has, with his masterful translations of poetry (Mayakovsky, Nazim Hikmet, Attila József, and others), greatly enriched Greek literature;

10. and, what is perhaps the most important, it has been, and still is, actively present in the most critical hours of the Greek nation, linked inseparably with his people.

It is necessarily from the side of Neo-Graecistics that Professor Savvidis' ten theses¹ strive — convincingly — to throw light upon the varied life-work — a life-work difficult to classify according to conceptual systems on account of that same variedness — of one of those lyricists of our age whose presence is of seminal importance. For us, when scanning the characteristic marks, possibilities, and bounds of modern lyrical poetry, they can yet only limitedly provide a starting-point for the placing in a coordinate-system of partially discrepant postulates. From our analysis we understandably have to exclude the first, too general, thesis, the sixth one, which pertains more specifically to a specialised branch of learning, but also the tangentially related ninth proposition; nor can we treat of the arguments stated under paragraph 8, albeit it is evident that the creative method of the Ritsos of the broad-sweeping epical syntheses and of the dramatical compositions is undivorceable from the poet of the epigrammatically terse lyrical pieces.² We have to consider conjunctly the assertions of the second and the tenth theses, the question of national and social engagedness, not detached from the four theses documenting the formal novelties or, defined in their narrower meaning (third, fourth, fifth, and seventh propositions). And even if lack of space and time does not permit us to track the unfolding of this extremely suggestive and individual lyrical poetry by touching on all its stages of development,³ and we are casting our merely on the pinnacles that it has produced hitherto, we nevertheless must supplement Savvidis' theses with a few other observations, with the indication of other regularities, which also seek to provide an answer to the question how far the bounds of the lyrical poetry of our days have widened, what new devices it is able to produce from the hidden recesses of its arsenal to answer its communicative and aesthetical mission.

The dialectical unity of Yannis Ritsos' universality, his specifically Greek character, and his attitude as a lyrist is rooted in a world of experience pregnant with contradictions and thoroughly contemporary in its preoccupations. In the impoverishment and breaking up of his ancient, aristocratic family he experienced as a young man — for years himself too as an inmate of T. B. sanatoria — not only the relentlessness of the destructive forces of nature (his mother and younger brother were carried off by tuberculosis, while his father and sister ended up in a mental institution), but also the disintegration of an obsolete manner of living. The long-drawnout attempts of his artistic mode of expression, simultaneously on the stage (he was a pantomimist, an operatic singer, and piano-accompanist in the '30s), in graphics, in the art of statuary, and in his elegiac poetical first fruit,⁴ are coextensive with the awakening of the self-awakening of the self-awareness of a new Greece set inexorably on the road of

capitalist development and still harping on the ancient Hellenic glory, yet already revolutionising the malcontented masses of the out-of-works (among them several thousand refugees from Asia Minor), and with the emergence of the first waves of an artistic revolution proclaiming new modes of expression. After the early intellectual (he reads Marx already in his school-days), and subsequently emotional concurrence with the working-class movement, the accession to the Communist Party, following the years the grandiose antifascist Resistance, the privation and defencelessness of first four years (1948–1952, Lemnos, Makronisos, Ay-Strati), then three years (1967–1970, Yaros, Leros, Samos) of internment fall to his lot, which is equally full of the apocalyptic reality of inhumanity – and typically of twentieth-century inhumanity, the inferno of fascism –, but also with heartening examples of human and class solidarity.⁵ This is an emotional hinterland of such kind, a course of life of such weight that on it an existentialist cry conceived in cosmic terror, a bitterly illusion-destroying sarcastical vulcanian ego-poetry may thrive, but also a doctrinarian, superintellectual thetical lyric poetry “Defiance and afflatus” – Lőrinc Szabó’s words seem to fit in here – are not foreign to Ritsos either, indeed, one of the principal thematic elements of his first volumes, a series of images of disintegration, does keep surfacing from the world of experience of his childhood later too in his long compositions (*The Dead House* = the exact replica of their one-time mansion, *Under the Shadow of the Mountain*, and chiefly in the description of the ghost-house of the *Moonlight Sonata*). Sarcasm prevails in the character delineations – *Theophrastean* in origin, and yet more savage than his prototype – of his first volume (*Tractor*),⁶ issued when he was 25, in 1934, while the nearly lachrymose, still traditional emotionality is predominant in the *Deathsong*,⁷ put into the mouth of the mother lamenting the youth murdered in the 1936 workers’ demonstration of Saloniki, a work set to music by Theodorakis; this cycle he wrote in the iambic quindecasyllable, generally regarded as the Greek national verse-form, which thereafter he was to completely banish from his poetry for three decades. We must state nevertheless that these features have not become determinative as marks of Ritsos’ lyrical poetry, a lyrical poetry that has come into existence as the negation of disintegration, inhumanity, death, but also of simplification, sentimentalism, indeed, as the negation of generally all illusions, all temptations to particularity, all alienation, and which sets concrete human alternatives against all these with *sui generis* devices.

It would be wrong to ignore the confession of the poet himself on the birth of the lyrical collections as defined in their narrower meaning, produced in the shadow of the large-scale synthetic compositions, in their “pauses of battle”, which form a straight line from the cycle *Comments on the Margin of Time*, written in 1938–41 – this is followed by the *Parentheses* (1946–1947), the *Summer School* (1953–1960), the *Exercises* (1950–1960), the *Short Dedication* (1960–1965), then in separate volumes: *Prfoofs I* (1963), *Proofs II* (1966), *Stones. Repetitions. Barricade* (1972), *Gestures* (1972), *Eighteen Songs on the Sorrowful Motherland* (1973),

Corridor and Stairs (1973), Wall in the Mirror (1974), Slips of Paper (1974) — up to the volume Porter's Lodge, published in 1976.⁸ Ritsos, in his short essay on the double volume entitled Proofs,⁹ writing about the terseness, strict composition, and impersonal tone of these short poems — and in some places querying himself as well — alleges a few reasons, thus he mentions with jocular seriousness his proclivity to laconism, proceeding from his Spartan (Monemvasian) ancestry, the heed to take some rest between the great compositions, the demand of daily practice for constant preparedness, the necessity of condensing expression (in order to eschew rhetoricalness), and lastly the necessity of swiftly responding to the cata-ract of momentary experiences. However, let's heed this advice of his, too, viz. that "poets engage in synthesis and not analysis", and don't let's rest contented with a direct self-avowal while questing for the characteristic features of this micro-poetry; and, to come back to what we have said about the impulsion of the world of experience, let's attempt instead to form a conception of this on the ground of Ritsos' indirect confessions embedded in poems, and on the basis of the poems themselves.

While reading any one of Ritsos' poems, the first astonishing experience is the all but useless search for the vocable "I", the virtually complete absence of any utterance in first person — namely, that of any utterance in his own name —, especially in the volumes of the last decade. Anyone trying to penetrate into this strange world is surprised by an almost complete *depersonalisation*, the total elimination of the immediacy of individual experiences. These poems are not devoid of first person utterances, nor — as is frequently found — of dialogues, but those speaking are invariably outised persons, most often nameless, working people, struggling, suffering people, submissive and heroic ones, those craving for affection and disillusioned ones.¹⁰ As often as not, the poems appear before us in the objectivity of the third person, with likewise nameless, ostensibly insignificant people and inanimate objects, quotidian situations in their centre. Their locale is chiefly those sections of the modern large city inhabited by common men (the poet's places of abode, for that matter); their subject-matter, or — if one prefers it so — plot, appears at first sight to be banal and peripheral. A world become dull, an indirect lyrical poetry becoming dull, which has surrendered its own positions, along with the outlived traditions? Ritsos himself answers this question in the negative, documenting in the organic unity of form and ethos, creative technique and world concept the substantiality of his *thematic democratism*,¹¹ in the first lines of his program poem written in 1946, The Notion of Simplicity:¹²

I hide behind quotidian objects, so that you might find me.
If you fail to find me, you will find the objects,
you will lay fingers on them as my hand has touched them,
and our handmarks will clasp.

And that this "clasping", this quest for a fellow creature between poet and recipient, man and man, is an immutable need also in our times is emphasised by him in the concluding lines of the poem:

Every word is a fresh start
for a tryst that has every time failed to come off,
and the word is true if you never despair of the tryst.¹³

The attributive (clause) "that has every time failed to come off" evidences illusion-free common sense, while the verb "you never despair" indicates boundless faith. Already now we have to take notice of the trenchancy and firmness of those verbs of Ritsos' lyrical poetry carrying a positive message, and of the ostensibly antimodern nuancedness of his epithets. Let us remember, however, that Ritsos is in all conscience a Spartan, also in his psychological-philological heritage: a carrier of laconical manful ruggedness, but also of the unadorned emotionality of the popular funeral-songs of Mani.¹⁴ The conscious acceptance of concreteness, of everydayness he formulates perhaps even more graphically in 1959, in the lines of a synthetic composition, the Bridge:

We are not humiliated by our trivial needs,
for they are our very protectors, who at all times
give new ground underneath our feet, — ground on which
to gain a foothold and obtain a firm plant,
ground to work on,
and if we recognise and accept them, that's precisely
our new brotherhood,
it is the threshold of our new-found freedom,
man's first and final sacred simplicity.

Workday-centricity, concreteness, and simplicity on the one side, with the need for the offer of another's hand, the heed for the meeting, and the *engagedness of brotherhood* on the other — the two supporting-pillars of Ritsos' lyrical poetry.¹⁵ But however explicit these fundamentals may be, Aragon's dictum that "Ritsos' passion lies in simplicity"¹⁶ still needs a more detailed elucidation, as does Gerard Pierrat's description of this lyrical poetry, which "revives the most ancient tradition by allowing the world and people to speak."¹⁷ Isn't this simplicity inductive to monotony, this universality inductive to an undue extension of the currently up-to-date humaneness? How is it possible, within this compass, to bring out the turbulent vibration of our times, and to throw into relief the commitment to a revolutionary idea? For an answer we must focus on a few peculiarities of the technique of poem-building: on an original application of the quotidian element as a basis for associations, the implantation in lyrical poetry of the elements of the attendant arts (drama, epic poetry, the visual arts, the eurhythmic arts, music), and finally the conscious incorporation of the mythemes as elements of historical memory, along with the application of irony, noting also that these innovations, while they render Ritsos' lyrical poetry not only workday-centred but also assertive-sentence and present-tense-centred, are always pregnant with ethical and — metathetically — with political contents.

One of the pivotal questions of the image-formation of Ritsos' short poems lies in the fact that the *quotidian objects, situations, and words*, that is, those that have already become trite in our thinking mechanism, become *charged*, by virtue of their unexpected and illogical occurrence, with an *intensity* capable of bringing in motion a multitude of emotions. This the poet achieves by the technique of disjoining the customary order of objects and situations, wishing to comply with the demand which regards a modernness invariably as a weapon against terror, nightmares, and real threats: "let a voice be born, let a voice be heard — some other voice, for the silence is full of gunfire cracking from unknown places" — he writes in the poem *We Are Waiting*.¹⁸ He himself characterises his method as "non-natural flowering" in a poem of the same title,¹⁹ in which the hero of an unheard and stifled cry he explodes from inside; he himself, however, thereupon picks up his scattered limbs, and re-creates himself by stopping up the holes with field poppies and yellow lilies. Somewhere else he speaks about the poem being "patched with the tatters of the shirts of the dead" (in the poem *Montage*³⁰). Hence it would be insufficient to see in this attempt no more than surrealism's impulsion of liberating force,²¹ ignoring the fact that the humanism of the respect for objects, "our most faithful brothers", and generally for elementary things and situations as well as unpretentious people arose, for Ritsos, from the distressing and elevating experience of physical indigence, hardship, and interdependence. It would be difficult, for example, to understand without the portrayal of fellow-creatures lacking the basic necessities in the cycle *Stone Age*,²² written on Makronisos, why a single word, a single object, a button "torn off by a gesture bred of anger — the gesture of anger *for me*", which here and now is yet a key-word, the key-word of a world-shaping idea, for

with this torn-off button of yours
I can button up your coats to the neck when you feel cold
or strip you naked, showing your beauty

— why it is able to impart hymnic solemnity to the arguments of the revolutionary agitator of the poem *Perseverance*;²³ for this outwardly insignificant button, which, in its new context, is nevertheless suggestive of class- and universal perspectives, proclaiming man's openness to conviction in favour of the good cause, "gleamed... like a tornado-lantern or... like moonrays in summer nights".

In a poem completely different, personal in its subjectmatter, in one of Ritsos' very infrequent love poems (entitled *We Two*²⁴), it is another colourless word — colourless because hacked to death by generations of poets — that is given a new function, an unexpected charge. It is the wind that has "nestled" between the intertwined fingers of the lovers — we can see that it is the verbal phrase that here makes the word so unexpected and full of tension. Our astonishment, however, does not stop here, for the wind

was the memory that had already been in preparation it
was the parting before the union

suggesting with the attributive (clause), which reads allusive in the Greek original as well, and the verbal paronomasia the tragic element lurking at the bottom of even the most intimate human relationship, without the (as much as ostensible) faintest suggestion of sentimentalism or its fashionable counterpart, *blaséness*.

The word changing its function (and hence provoking our understanding) is sometimes also a device of humour, as the tree thriving "in every dark, confined courtyard" in the poem *Motionless*,²⁵ "is prepared to jump out through the fencing any day", urging the sunshine that then *it* should grapple onto its branches and jump in through the fencing. This cheerful series of associations is yet wholly and completely removed from a cheap of jokes, for if we essayed to translate it into prose — which, incidentally, would be a totally unfruitful and senseless attempt —, we would be reminded of e. g. the image of the traditional woman's fate or the range of problems of the masses of the people willing to change the world but theoretically unprepared, and it would be possible to think of so many other things, but the main point is not the "explanation" but the polyphonic quality.

We could go on quoting examples in thousands for the effectuality of the Ritsosian association-formation, and it is only for the purpose of illustrating the close correlation of formal inventiveness and the ethical-intellectual momentum that we supplement the above with a few sentences, desiring to demonstrate how much the state of affairs out from the usual pattern is in the service of a new humaneness, with great force and in an individual fashion. The hero of the poem *Draft Letter*²⁶ (here the poet himself) gives his distant mate a humdrum account of the performance of trivial household duties, to add in the end: "I have't shot down the eagle yet. The time for that too will come some day", proclaiming in an astonishing manner the dictate of patience, determination, and fortitude, — indirectly, not commenting, without launching out into overdidactic explanations, and yet to all of us. The man to be executed (the title of the poem is identical²⁷) — and how many such people there were in the Greece of the last decennia! —, while facing the gun-barrel, thinks not of evanescence but of the fact that he is in good health, and the weight of his genitals is normal — could one raise a more grotesque and yet more convincing monument to the memory of those who have bravely laid down their lives for a good cause? Scarcely is there to be found in the lyrical poetry of our days a more forceful negation of the state of being uprooted from the community, of loneliness than the poem entitled *Afternoon*,²⁸ in which this basic problem of a multitude of poets (and in general, of people) is thrown into relief through a dual transposition, as a star fallen on the margin of the evening, and subsequently as a cutoff ear that does not hear the crickets. Not a parable only a simple statement of facts is the little story of the horseman riding full tilt all night before reaching his destination, only to find that no-one

is expecting him (the poem *He Lived for His Work Alone*,²⁹ but being afforded solace by the sense of having met the obligation he has assumed taking the form of a flash in his horse's "dark dying eyes", which is "his bulwark, his far-distant bulwark in a rainy landscape". "Our principal freedom is not loneliness but brotherhood", he wrote in the great monologue of the Bridge, and indeed, unfolding in the focus of Ritsos' ethics is a world concept which has in its centred a community coming into being as an association of sovereign individuals, something he does not declaim but metathetically proclaims also in his small poems, bringing in motion the ostensible colourlessness of objects, everyday people and life-situations by dint of unexpected sense-transformations in such a way it should induce the recipient to define his/her attitude.

A no less important peculiarity of the up-to-date poetic diction is that the concreteness of Ritsos' lyrical poetry is combined with an *assertive-sentence-centred* tone³⁰ mostly foreign to the poetry of previous ages but already appearing in a few occasional flashes in the Kavaphisian historical parables. In the mature Ritsos poems the direct emphasis is growing rarer and rarer, while the number of interrogatory, exclamatory, and imperative sentences is small. Arising here is one of the fundamental questions of the lyrical poetry of our century: is poetry able, circumscribing the traditional modes of the fluctuation of emotions, to impart mere to communications an emphasis derived from inside, from the import of the message, which may call into existence a more up-to-date variety of the aesthetical quality? This may involve the danger of the pseudomodern attitude of spiritlessness and impassivity. Ritsos eschews these with adroitness, in particular, by deriving *the wide range of the subtleties of the modulation from those attendant arts* which he has formerly tried his hand at (and as for graphics and small sculpture, for instance, he has throughout remained faithful to them), and which enables the poem's structure to be rendered strict and yet variegated, polyphonic and multi-motional, that is, to be indued with a quality of inexhaustibility.³¹ It is rather difficult to observe separately the modes of these arts in the Ritsosian verse construction, yet these too may perhaps adduce proof to the fact that the art of mankind, coming nearer and nearer to adulthood while progressing along the path leading to self-existent specificity, — that this art too is gradually growing to demand forms worthy of adults, thus for example the elementary cry, animal in origin, has by now — with the gradual loss of importance of the problem-raising, questioning poetry of the man of class societies (childhood) — come to require a poetry communicative in its fundamental character and prospectively worthy of the empire of freedom, and yet capable of condensing into it all emotive nuances.

It would be outside the scope of this study to examine by what means lyricism comes across in the syntheses widening out to the point of becoming epic (e. g. in the volume *In the Vicinity of the World*, written in 1951) and in the dramatic compositions deservedly successful world-wide in the spirit of the revival of the antique choral song and monologue, from the *Moonlight Sonata* to *The Destruction of Melos*, from *Philoctetes* to the

Messengers.³² From the viewpoint of our subject-matter far more decisive is the inverse process which, in the short poems, renders the contexture tight with the device of dramatic condensation, enhancing the pregnancy of its message character and the authenticity of its human contents. The observations of Ritsos the erstwhile active performer are here amply turned to good account. We have chosen by way of example a "Lied" not modern in scansion but written in traditional versus politicus, to document the quoted unity of the creating of a poems as practised by Ritsos, the twelfth piece of the cycle *Eighteen Songs on the Sorrowful Motherland*:

A small bevy of slender girls are catching salt from the sea-water,
swaying full of sadness, blind to the sea.
A white sail keeps waving to them from blue waters, and, not
getting an answer, the canvas turns black from sorrow.

The miniature tragedy is contemporary, Greek, and universal, in its temporal determinedness and historical concreteness. Its basic conflict is the poetical formula of alienation: for the girls impelled by the necessity of sustenance, the sea (the world) is no more than a means of subsistence (like the seawater), they can find no pleasure in it, unable to make themselves acquainted with its beauty. The tragic momentum is here carried by the verbs, which transmit in an emotionally nuanced fashion the cruel realities. The question *Why?* occurs implicitly to the reader. This question — why has this to be so? — is indicated (even though not said, only caused to be said) by the poet. The second half of the poem, written in the dual distich, which, in renaissance lyrical poetry and in Greek popular poetry, was originally known as a form of love-lays, does hold out a sudden slender hope, by means of two rhyming epithets (which, incidentally but not unimportantly, are also emblematical of the Greek national colours). The white sail showing on the blue water, the hope of a more human existence, is, for the girls, unattainable; albeit the waving is meant for them, they, in their state of being enclosed in their particularity, can see neither the depth of the sea (world) nor the sheets. The cathartic effect of the failure of the tryst to come off (let's refer back to the program-like lines of *The Notion of Simplicity*), its intensification into a mute cry, the cry of protest, is only enhanced again by a formally bare communication, the reference to the ancient Theseus legend, but with a concreteness of Ritsosian tension: the image of the canvas turning black of its own accord (behold, the correction of the myth) comes therefore as a fulminant curse of great inner emotion invoked upon the dehumanising power of exploitation.³³

Let us linger for a short while on the subject of alienation, seeing it again in a short poem similarly incorporating elements of popular poetry, but of no set rhythm:

This it is that fills you with horror.
The straw for the horses.

The faggot for the fire.
 The horses were slaughtered on the road.
 They failed to kindle a fire.
 They used the straw
 to stuff the rag-dolls of dressmaker's salons,
 to stuff the scarecrows of the fields,
 so as to frighten off the wolves,
 so as to frighten off the crows,
 so as to also frighten you, who have made
 this pathetic scarecrow.³⁴

If in the previous poem the dramatic aspect was the predominant element, here it is the epic quality that strikes the eye; we see a miniature epopee. Its characters are a few animals and inanimate objects; concerning the protagonist, the man in second person (the man of our age) the exposition discloses nothing more than the sense of aversion towards the other two characters. The following lines (cantos) present the natural, proper relationship of things, in a seemingly disimpassioned fashion (horse — straw, fire — faggot). The plot, however, is upended, this order breaks down, three characters vanish from sight at one and the same time. It is Greek folk-songs that have as their subject-matter this twofold or threefold object and its frustration.³⁵ Ritsos's story now takes a new turn, and the straw, with the double stuffing, also becomes a protagonist. The object is given a new function, a new intended purpose: to frighten (sg or sy) off. And this is the point where the story is linked up again with repulsion: the object gets the mastery of man, who has used it, — instead of its natural purpose, that is, that purpose of it benefiting man in a positive fashion (feeding, heating), — in the interest of his individual desire for property, and, upsetting this order, has turned the object against himself by alienating it (and also himself) from its quiddity. None but a poet keenly alive to the real place of man and nature, as well as the intended purpose of our human species — let's tell it straight, none but a Marxist poet — is able, with this indirect suggestiveness, to incite his addressees to envisage such a substantial issue.

Not for nothing has Ritsos graduated from the schools of the visual and eurhythmic arts as well. His modern colour sense is convincingly evinced already by his early pieces. Besides the poem Picasso's Palette, long since known in Hungarian as well, let us refer to the unusual tone-description of the small poem *Emphatic Colours* from the cycle entitled *Summer School*:

The mountain is red. The sea is green.
 The sky is yellow. The earth is blue.
 Perched between a bird and a leaf is death.

But we are also entitled to include in this category another piece of the same period — a piece from the 'fifties —, named *The Woman's Hand*,³⁶

in which the darkness of the room at nightfall is broken only by the woman's white hand, illuminating the striking of the clock, the furniture, the vases, giving new life to a handkerchief, a table-cloth, giving strength and light with the power of tenderness to all things, even to the emotionally restrained man in her company. A modern poet cannot be a negator of genuine beauty and tenderness. It is this that gives confidence to the principal figure too of a piece in the most recent Ritsos volume, the Porter's Lodge, the one called *A No Longer Young Ballerina* (the title of the poem is identical³⁷), while rehearsing to herself the elements of an old dance in a, for us, expressive fashion. "My left leg is lighter. The right is more clever", she states, and this countervails the rolling by of the years; the experience and the practising are capable of accomplishing the miracle; the harmony of the movement evokes the youthful grace, able to afford pleasure to her spectators.

In a modern genre picture presenting a suburban family, on the other hand, it is the force of visibility, the harmonious contexture of the movements that accentuate the repulsive effect, the protest-provoking quality of a disharmonious, povertystricken life-style profoundly social in its roots and unworthy of man. Its title is *From Behind the Crack*.³⁸

The partition-wall is made of wood; lots of cracks have appeared on it. What you can see between is Vangelis undressing, Keti praying, the old man blind — a basin, a chair, the mirror, in the mirror, a rope, the shoes, the salt-holder, and a basketful of threads. Vangelis throws off his trousers, Katina prays, with the old man scratching his nose: "If you don't believe me I have witnesses", he says. Vangelis gives him a kick, goes to the mirror, stares at his penis, lifts the rope, and, making a noose, hangs it in his neck.

We think that this calls for no detailed comment. Let us limit ourselves to this remark only, that the transformation of the direct protest welling up in Ritsos's early lyrical poetry into an indirect protest has, in the course of times, only increased the inner intensity of his revolutionary poetry, as well as deepening its aesthetical character, and the "mere" elicitation of words, of confessions from the objects and situations by means of the devices of other arts was an ingredient in the renaissance of Greek lyrical poetry.

The natural passion for innovation is corroborated, too, by all that the literature in the field has hitherto managed to observe concerning the musical conception of Ritsos' poems,³⁹ by no means exhausting the subject by referring to the titles — *Springtime Symphony* (1938), *The Ocean's March* (1940), *An Old Mazurka to Raindrop Rhythm* (1943) — and layout of a few early compositions having the form of rhapsodies. The scope of this paper does not allow us to present as much as the broad outlines of the inner symphonic structure of the sweeping miniature poem beginning

with *I belonged to the word*, the phenomenal play of modulations, in the course of which the poet, by a constant changing of the function of the conceptual-semantic-syntactic and lexical-tonal-metrical spheres, provoked the understanding, emotion, and patience of the recipient, in order to create — in eight short lines, out of 18 vocables, and 62 sounds — a polyphonic work forcefully proclaiming the mission of man and art; a detailed analysis of the poem we have performed in another study.⁴⁰ Let us return instead to the small *ars poetica* illustrating the theme of Savvidis' fifth thesis, the bridging of silence, a poem in which the intellectual setting forth is counterpointed, after a visual transition of an exquisitely light touch, by three, to outward seeming, inorganically polished-off, jingling trochaic hexasyllables — again adumbrative of the inspiration of Greek folk-poetry —, resolving austerity through emotionality, and leading the duality of the mission of poetry, addressed to our consciousness and not only our consciousness, to an arresting synthetic image.

The poem
is the mould of silence.
One day
between the edges of words
his face will appear.
His eyes show no trace of crying.
Three diamonds
motionless
flashing affixed to his chest.⁴¹

The great moral force of Ritsos' lyrical poetry even in its workday-centredness, simple-sentence-centredness, and its closely related non-moralising character⁴² is not only a product of the realities of our age, but it also desires to speak to the man of our times, even if the poet does not neglect the past, and even if his artistic devices, as well as his man-image, project before us the prospects of the future. Therefore it would not be stretching things to suggest the *present-centredness* of Ritsos's small poems. Nor is it an exaggeration of only because the better part of these poems rigorously adheres to the principle of present-tense action. Still we cannot evade — albeit this is a problem of primarily the large-scale compositions — Ritsos's attitude towards the past, in particular the classic antiquity, and in general towards the question of the collective human memory, handed down in the most poetical fashion in the mytheme.

This is all the more needful because the other two great personalities of modern Greek lyrical poetry approached this question in different ways: as for Kavaphis, it was in the guise of the figures of the decadent periods of Greek history that he pronounced an ironical judgement on the moral decay of capitalist society, while for Seferis it was to seek solace from the factitiousnesses of our century that he turned towards the human values of the classical age.⁴³ The Greek Left, from the 'thirties onwards, as a protest against the bourgeois theory of the Hellenic-Christian culture, had for

decades been laying great emphasis on that which marks off the Greece saddled with numerous social contradictions of the twentieth century from the ancient past.⁴⁴ Ritsos' attitude towards the Greek past is far more differentiated already at the outset of his career, and in the course of decades it has become unequivocal, viz. to accept from the sometimes truly oppressive heritage of the ancient world that which is valid for the present as well, which helps us forwards.⁴⁵ This is how, in his poem *Ancient Theatre*,⁴⁶ he stated his views on this:

The Greek echo... does not imitate or repeat,
but it continues.

It is this basic position that enlightens the by no means purely technical nature of the procedure whereby Ritsos is constantly surrounding the fate of the characters of the large-scale monologues with the objects of our contemporary life, for Teiresias and the Melian old women alike grapple with contemporary problems, speaking about the sufferings and thirst for freedom of today's Greek man, as well as *his* struggle for a more human existence. The up-to-date acceptance of the antiquity must, at the same time, also embody the negation of all fallacious ideological inferences, asserts the poet in the poems of the cycle *Repetitions*, written in Leros, which treats of subjectmatters relating to the times of the ancients. Especially instructive is in the poem *Heracles and We*⁴⁷ the counterposing — after a Homerically hymnally incepted apostrophic start embellished with epithets — of a modern way of looking at things to the formerly positive course of action assuming shape in the figure of the antique deity, which, however, has by now become an illusion — a personal rise in status through great exploits accomplished by means of exceptional natural endowments —, the non-real route of the rise of the human species.

As for us, however, it was without teachers, solely by the
strength of our own minds,
by patience, in a sea of torment, choosing from among a
multitude of alternatives, that we became
what we are.

This attitude, without any arbitrary interpretation being imposed on it, is, in its dignity and historical actuality, the morality of the class destined to organise the new life, a class which, from complete subjection, aspires after power for universal human interests, viz. the working class; a formulation of the historical mission of those who, together with the Melian women, may say, without frippery and sophistication, for this is the truth:

In work we have grown into men, in work we have learned
what work is, in work we have learned
to dispel cares, to be self-oblivious, and to start everything all
over again.⁴⁸

Nor is there any sharp contrast between this ideological-ethical quality and the rare method when Ritsos derives his immediate subject-matter from another gold-mine of European civilisation, Judaic-Christian mythology. In one piece, written in the last year of the Papadopoulos dictatorship, of the volume *Slips of Paper*, he revives a dually Biblical tradition, proclaiming this time too the present, as well as the suffering of his homeland and people; and now, as an exception to stand beside the rule, he departs even from his assertive-sentence-centricity. By loosely dashing off the objects, he, as it were, mosaically composes the well-known situation of the crucifixion, which he expands with the Old-Testament mytheme element of Cain's unaccepted sacrifice:

The two piles
the stamping
the stones the stones
the woman lying full length
the broken bottle
the veronica nestling close to the wall
the features taking form in the veronica
the thorns
the light's fleeting glint on the thorns
in the afternoon in the night
how often oh Lord
how often oh Lord
how much longer oh Lord
by the small light
by the lowering smoke
by the earthen jar?⁴⁹

Greek history, universal history, past and present are pregnant with numerous illusions and repulsive elements. Ritsos, in times putting man to the test, has many and many a time envisaged them also in his physical reality, but facing up to history is something no-one can elude even in the course of everyday life. How is it possible, rising superior to the illusions of the age, to look it in the face in such a way that it should put our truly contemporary activity on the right track — this too is inherent in Ritsos' teaching, not in a didactic fashion but by means of irony. It is pre-eminent-ly according to the evidence of the volumes of recent years that *irony* has become one of his determinative devices, one of the key elements of his present-tense quality. Here too our examples must be circumscribed. The concluding piece of *Slips of Paper* takes us back to Homeric times, yet it warns — shifting the emphasis this time, in the concrete approach, onto the epithets — of the nationalistic "Great Idea", which led to the 1922 catastrophe of Asia Minor, of all nationalisms as one of the monstrous self-deceptions of our epoch:

That same night
 soon after the fire
 the wooden horse
 gigantic deaf
 without the armed men in its womb
 has opened
 its jaw
 without teeth
 to say,
 "Have you deceived the Trojans
 or your own selves?"
 Down on the seashore blood was flowing.⁵⁰

Irony evoking historical and contemporary events experienced glimmers in another small poem too of this same volume. One of his strange devices is to start by accumulating platitudes, which in turn provide a striking contrast to the concluding pseudosupplication as it receives emphasis:

That's better now.
 Everything is better this way.
 Nothing ever be worse, oh Lord.
 Let me take a breath
 between two coffees
 and three wars.⁵¹

And finally let us close the line with a poem from the volume Porter's Lodge, which — albeit formally, in accordance with the Ritsos method, purely communicative — is, however, illusion-destroying in a pronouncedly quotidian manner, and, more specifically, castigative of a permanent artificiality. Its title is *The Funambulist and the Spectators*.⁵² For fourteen lines the poet does nothing else than describe in a suggestive manner (and the Hungarian reader of poetry can here associatively recall Gábor Garai's *Acrobats*) the breath-taking exercise high up in the air of a rope-walker with a yellow umbrella in his hand. It is a fascinating image, full of dynamism and confidence in human abilities. The concluding four verses cool our enthusiasm into soberness:

And we were waiting smoking a cigarette somewhat lower down
 ordinarily for the program to be continued
 especially that turn with the thousand female legs
 gyrating high above with black stockings and pin-heeled
 shoes.

Is it accidental that the poet speaks in first person plural? It is scarcely conceivable. The collective participation in the shared illusion, and the collective error both generalise, reproaching for the unconcerned disre-

gard of genuine values, also registering with sympathy that the concentrated terror, the thick tension that is also a general characteristic of our age, must be dissolved in some way. The up-to-dateness of Ritsos' irony is resident in its polyphonic character, too.

The summing up of our comments aimed at substantiating the accuracy of the Savvidisian theses, but also at capturing from a new angle the chief characteristics of Ritsos' method of building up a short poem is rendered unnecessary by Ritsos himself, giving us to understand his present *ars poetica* in the epilogue of his most recent volume.⁵³ It is with the first sentences of this that we end our observations on this intensely contemporary lyrical oeuvre, social revolutionary in spirit, engaged in the interest of universal human values, and full of vigour in its modernness, which may have given a signal to lyrical poetry — this genre which still possesses exhaustless reserves — on a few momentums pointing to its future, too. "With the passage of time I see more and more clearly that my work, in the course of its formation and pursuit, proceeds — unintentionally and not deliberately — in the direction of the ridiculing, degrading, and denuding of all nightly phantoms as well as those of the day, and, more generally, of death. If there exist at all any kind of catharsis it is only possible by means of the assuagement of the severity of pain and fear (natural, moral, and social in origin), the controlled irony of our "historical" delusions, on the ground of the community of the feeling of a truly or ostensibly collective participation and collective guilt — the community of one and the same destiny."

¹ The text of the theses we give, of necessity, in a digested form. For a detailed exposition of them see pp. 198–206 of the Ritsos Memorial Volume (henceforth MW) of March–June 1976 of the Journal *Αἰολικά Γράμματα*.

² This is given a full treatment by K. Kulufakos, in his study entitled *Ὁ προβληματισμός στην ποίηση τοῦ Γιάννη Ρίτσου. Ἐπιθεώρηση Τέχνης* V. (May 1957) 392–399, and since then by several authors, in an especially noteworthy fashion by R. Lacote, in the 13th December 1967 issue of *Les Lettres Françaises*.

³ No study of comparable fullness of details has been made hitherto with the method of historicity; the fair number of analyses handle, in most instances, the characteristic features of only one given volume of verses, chiefly in review form. Of the three Ritsos monographs so far, that of G. Pierrat (Paris 1975) is primarily biographical, that of Cr. Sanglignio (Florence 1975) is a thematic, that is non-historical and nongenre analysis, while the surpassing short monograph of Chr. Papandreou-Prokopaki (Paris 1968) could give only limited space to this problem, which, however, cannot be evaded by the history of literature.

⁴ Y. Valetas: *Οἱ ποιητικές ἀποχές τοῦ Ρίτσου*. MV 244–257.

⁵ The most reliable Ritsos-chronology yet is also the work of Y. Valetas: MV 295–300.

⁶ The title of the cycle is *Portraits (Πορτραῖτα)*. See Y. Ritsos: *Ποιήματα*, A. Athens 19747. 21–42. Its main types are the individualist, the negator of all things, the pseudo-revolutionary, the egotist, the waverer, the maladjusted one.

⁷ See Y. Ritsos: *Ποιήματα* A. 161–182. Its first edition in 1936. In the summer of that same year the Metaxas dictatorship committed it to the flames of the pile of books set up in front of the Olympic Zeus Temple in Athens. Its affinity with Garcia Lorca's Death-song, and the threads that link it up with the ethos of Gorky's Mother have long been corroborated in an unequivocal manner, and can by now be regarded as facts of literary history.

⁸ The original Greek titles and data of the cycles: *Σημειώσεις στὰ Περιθώρια τοῦ χρόνου* (In: *Ποιήματα* A. 459–498); *Παρενθέσεις* (In: *Ποιήματα* B. Athens. 1975⁶. 451–474); *Θερινὸ φροντιστήριον* (In: *Ποιήματα* Δ. Athens 1975. 23–129); *Ἀσκήσεις* (In: *Ποιήματα* Γ.

Athens 1964, 311–476). The subsequent cycles were already published as volumes: *Μαρτυρίες Σειρά πρώτη*, Athens 1963; *Μαρτυρίες Σειρά δεύτερη*, Praha 1966; *Πέτρος Ἐπαναλήφει Κικλίδωμα*, Athens 1972; *Χειρονομίες*, Athens 1973; *Δεκαοχτώ λιανοτράγουδα τῆς πικρῆς πατρίδας*, Athens 1973; *Διάδρομος καὶ σκάλα*, Athens 1973; *Ὁ τοῖχος μέσα σὺν καθρέφτη*, Athens 1974; *Χάρτινα*, Athens 1974; *Θυρωρεῖο*, Athens 1976. Only a quite small fraction of this can be known to the Hungarian reader, primarily a few pieces of the cycles entitled respectively Parentheses and Proofs, from the selection entitled Holdfény-szonáta (Moonlight Sonata, 1964), and from the anthologies Kövek (Stones, Modern Greek Lyrical Poetry, 1966) and *D. Hadzis* (Ed.): *Az újgörög irodalom kistükre* (A Short Survey of Modern Greek Literature, 1971), which nevertheless give predominant emphasis to the synthetic Ritsos poems; indeed, the selection named *Mélosz pusztulása*. (The Decay of Melos, 1974) is based exclusively on these. The painful deficiency is only partially remedied by a new selection just about to be published, made from the material of the volume *Stones*. Repetitions. Barricade, translated by Géza Képes.

⁹ See in the volume of studies entitled *Μελετήματα*, Athens 1974, 95–102.

¹⁰ K. Kulufakos's dictum (op. cit. 399.) that Ritsos has created up-to-date human characters by, as it were, dividing himself, may, *mutatis mutandis*, be interpreted as applying to the creative method of the short poems as well.

¹¹ This definition of ours is corroborated by *B. Jentzscheklaus* and *D. Sommer* (MV 148), underscoring that the materialism of Ritsos's poetry relies upon the all but magic power it imparts to objects, thus allowing them to actively participate in the misery and at the same time elevating condition of people; and by *S. Gilles* (France Nouvelle, 17th January 1968), pointing out that Ritsos's principal subject-matter is man, common and naked modern man, with his working tools by which he seeks to make life more beautiful, while his way to happiness is blocked by a towering mountain of difficulties.

¹² That the poem, which belongs to the cycle Parentheses, is one of the key poems of Ritsos's lyrical poetry has been stressed, already amongst the first, by one of his French translators, *J. Lacarrière* (Le Monde, 27th December 1967); Savvidis too quotes it in this connection, to illustrate his third thesis.

¹³ The quotes in our study of Ritsos's poems are given in the English translation of Bálint Sebestyén made for the purposes of this article.

¹⁴ On this *X. Valetas: Γιάννης Ρίτσος*, MV 314–315.

¹⁵ It would lead us too far afield to examine whether and when this concreteness, as a representation of materiality can be transcended on the basis of the poetical (for the time being, only philosophical) program of concreteness as a quality in the nature of a process. Here we must rest content with merely stating that the condition of resembling a process is not unknown in Ritsos' poetry either, still, it is via concreteness as the representation of materiality that this poetry, for all its formal boldness, achieves the high degree of clarity (see Savvidis' fourth thesis) the communicational value of which is of prime importance from the viewpoint of the recipient of a revolutionary lyrical poetry not slogan-like but metathetically declarative of its engagedness (see Savvidis' second thesis).

¹⁶ Les Lettres Françaises, 24th March 1971.

¹⁷ In the preface to the French translation of the volume named Proofs (Paris 1966), MV 184.

¹⁸ In 1947, in the cycle Parentheses.

¹⁹ In the volume *Gestures*. It was written in 1970. An excellent analysis of it has been given by *Rula Kakkamanaki: Οι "Χειρονομίες" τοῦ Γιάννη Ρίτσου*, MV 225.

²⁰ It is from 1969, the volume called *Gestures*. The technique of disjoining the customary order had already previously engrossed the attention of Ritsos's analysts. *H. Juin* (L'Humanité, 29th July 1975) also writes about short compositions constructed of fleeting images, fragments of dialogues, and unanswered questions; while *I. Fleischmann* (Literární Noviny, 12th September 1959) sees in this act a re-creation or order according to new considerations, with a view to restoring a human aspect to the world.

²¹ *Sofiya Ilynskaya*, in her monograph *Поэзия сопротивления в послевоенной Греции. Судьба одного поколения*. Moscow, 1974, reminds of the extremely important circumstance that surrealism on Greek soil, despite the plant it has obtained in poetical practice, had no unequivocal philosophical or aesthetic program; this, amongst other things, is also responsible for the fact that the poets employing the innovations of surrea-

lism, from Ritsos to Elitis, have come nearer to Greek reality. B. Jenzschenklau and D. Bommer (op. cit. 148), corroborating this, emphasise that Ritsos' personal world of experience, which has led him to this school, is a momentum of greater consequence than the study of surrealism to evolve his creative method. It is by further concretising their thesis that we essay to demonstrate more organically the interrelation between world of experience and creative method.

²² Otherwise called Makronisos poems (*Πέτρινοι Χρόνοι* or *Μακρονησιώτικα*). They were written amidst appalling sufferings, in the summer of 1949, and the poet hid them in a bottle from his warders. Only after long years did the manuscript come to light. They were published in a separate volume in 1957, by the publishing house of political émigrés, then in a revised form in 1974, in Athens. Several pieces of them are outstanding, especially *The Hand of the Comrades*, a masterpiece of world-wide importance of socialist political poetry. Several poems of this cycle are also available in Hungarian, in the selection entitled *Moonlight Sonata*, and the anthologies entitled respectively *Stones and Cells Facing the Sea* (1970), in the translation of Árpád Papp. The other great product of this creative period is the revolutionary rhapsody *The Greek Nation* (in Greek: *Ρωμιοσύνη. Ποιήματα* B. 57–72 (1945–1947), raising a monument to the memory of the popular fighters of the Resistance and of the Civil War. In Hungarian only the sections set to music by Theodorakis are available, in Géza Képes's translation, in the anthology *A Short Survey of Modern Greek Literature*.

²³ From the cycle entitled *Exercises*.

²⁴ Also from the cycle entitled *Exercises*.

²⁵ From this same cycle. All three examples are from the 'fifties, but the short examples embrace almost all periods.

²⁶ From the cycle *Short Dedication*, which was written in the summer of 1953, — with a few exceptions — in Samos, in the first weeks of the poet's marriage.

²⁷ From the cycle called *Gestures*, from 1970. Once again we rely on Rula Kaklamani's sensitive analysis (MV 225–227), which is novel also because the formal method of analysing a poem, even if to a limited extent, does appear on its pages.

²⁸ From the cycle *Parentheses*, from 1947.

²⁹ From volume 1 of *Proofs*. It was written in the early 'seventies. We cannot agree with R. Merchant's interpretation (broadcast over BBC 3 on 1st February 1970 = MV 138), for we perceive no extreme pessimism in the note that the poem ends on, even if the situation is a tragic one.

³⁰ The superiority in Ritsos's lyrical poetry of this tone to a direct cry is convincingly attested by H. Juin (*Magazine Littéraire*, no. 9 of 1973, 79–80 = MV 120–126).

³¹ This multi-quality character of the Ritsosian short poem has been emphasised already by P. Levi as well, with reference to the volume *Repetitions. Stones. Barricade* (MV 132–134), without, however, looking for any starting-point regarding its origin.

³² The phenomenon, in the cyclic compositions, of the widening out into epic poetry is correctly perceived by D. Hadzis (in the postscript to the Hungarian selection *The Decay of Melos*, 1974, 150–151), yet it is to be regretted that he draws no distinction, in Ritsos's long poems, between the epic and the dramatic compositions; this is the reason why, at this point, we lean to I. Lakatos's review (*Nagyvilág*, 19 [1974] 1582). At the same time we completely disagree with the statement in the review that Ritsos' epic works "form an incontestably more valuable part of his oeuvre than his lyrical output". To write down this, without deeper deliberation, is an exaggeration by the fellow-poet only explained but not vindicated by the fact that approx. 95 per cent of Ritsos's lyrical poetry is entirely unknown in Hungary (see above, note 8). No illusion would be more misleading for our literary public opinion than to imagine, after the translation of a few impressionistically selected Ritsos volumes, — so long as we do not have a Hungarian oeuvre-selection comparable to that of Neruda or Aragon, for the poet in question is of the same order as the former —, that we are already acquainted with the poet, who, incidentally, was styled a man of genius by Aragon himself, on reading the *Moonlight Sonata* in 1957, then "the greatest poet alive" (see above, note 16), on preusing *Repetitions. Stones. Barricade*, in 1971.

³³ This dramatic quality of the piece, as, indeed, the variedness of a few other pieces of the cycle, Theodorakis's music was, unfortunately, unable to bring out. It was written on the Liedform, and, in the wake of the musical setting of several other programs poems by Ritsos, is here too program music. This contradiction also indicates what Ritsos himself terms an

"unintentional" momentum in his poetry. We know that the poet intended the 18 songs expressly for song-poems, but their best pieces have become poetical products in their own right, and the song-form has become only an ancillary feature of their quality.

³⁴ From the volume *Slips of Paper*. It was written in 1973.

³⁵ Let us adduce for a parallel a Géza Képes poem written as the paraphrase of a Greek folk-song of identical structure:

Cretan Sounds

I have ordered three guardians to take care of you,
 setting the sun above the mountain, the bearded vulture on the plain,
 and the fresh northerly wind on the sea.
 The sun has verged, the eagle has dropped off to sleep,
 the northern wind has been taken away by the ships –
 and death has found you, too; it has found you and snatched you away.

We have already hinted at the affinity of the two structures, in our study: A modern görög irodalom a szovjet neogrecisztika tükrében (Modern Greek Literature as Presented by Soviet Neo-Graecistics) (Now in print, in the János Horváth memorial volume, being published by the Latin Department of the University of Budapest).

³⁶ From the cycle *Short Dedication*.

³⁷ It was written in 1971.

³⁸ From the volume *Corridor and Stairs*. It was written in 1970.

³⁹ See P. Spandonidis: *Ἡ σύγχρονη ποιητική γενεά* (1930–1960). Athens 1962. 10; K. Kulufakos: op. cit. 399, and X. Mochos: *Современная греческая литература*, Moscow 1973, Chapter 6.

⁴⁰ See our study: A világ újrakimondása. Kísérlet egy Ritszosz-vers komplex elemzésére (The Re-enunciation of the World. An Attempt at a Complex Analysis of a Ritsos Poem). *Filológiai Közöny* 23 (1977).

⁴¹ From the volume called *Slips of Paper*. It was written in 1973.

⁴² A similar description was given by E. Jebeleanu, in his essay on the future of poetry (Contemporanul, 9th February 1959 = MV 167), designating Ritsos' poetry as speculative but not philosophising.

⁴³ On this, and most especially the attitude to history of the long Ritsos compositions, aspiring after objectivity, but with a non-Marxist method, see K. Myrsiades: *Τὸ ἐλληνικὸ παρελθὸν στὸ ἐλληνικὸ παρόν στὴν ποίησιν τοῦ Γιάννη Ρίτσου*. MV 266–280.

⁴⁴ Thus, among others, in D. Hadzis's historical synthesis of modern Greek literature, presented as the connecting text of A Short Survey of Modern Greek Literature (Budapest 1971). On the question see our study: *Új hullám az újgörög irodalomtörténetírásban* (New Wave in Modern Greek Literary History-writing). *Filológiai Közöny* 21 (1975) 444–449 = *Eine neue Welle in der neugriechischen Literaturgeschichtsschreibung*. *Annales...*, Sectio classica 4 (1976) 81–91.

⁴⁵ This has already been briefly adverted to, in the study A modern görög irodalom a szovjet neogrecisztika tükrében. See above, note 35.

⁴⁶ From volume I of *Proofs*, from the early 'sixties.

⁴⁷ Similarly from the cycle *Repetitions*. It was written on the 23th March 1968.

⁴⁸ In the lyrical oratorio named *The Decay of Melos*. It was written in 1969.

⁴⁹ The poem was written between June 1973 and May 1974. It is found in the first half of the third cycle of the volume *Slips of Paper*. Only for a reminder, without any comment: falling on the middle of this period, November 1973, was the bloody suppression of the riots at the Technical University of Athens.

⁵⁰ The last piece of the selfsame third cycle, the time coordinates are identical with the former. The list of poems treating of subject-matters relating to the ancient world could be extended, eg, by the poem called *The Stairway*, from the volume *Corridor and Stairs*, whose value (the modern paraphrase of the theme of Odysseus and the Sirens) is likewise pointed out by K. Myrsiades (MV 179).

⁵¹ From the first cycle of the volume *Slips of Paper*, from yet 1970.

⁵² Date of writing: 17th May 1971. Ritsos frequently derives his subject-matter from the world of the ring of the circus. Already the cycle *Barricade*, written in 1969, features the character of the funambulist. An outstandingly beautiful work of this same cycle is the poem

The Closed Circus, metathetically and forcefully protesting against the fascist mockery of freedom, but also radiant with the faith in a more human existence, which the Hungarian public has come to know in Géza Képes's masterful rendition.

⁵⁴ It was written in August 1972. The complete epilogue can be read on pp. 167–108 of the volume entitled *Porter's Lodge*, and on pp. 105–106 of the volume of Ritsos's collected studies (*Μελέτηματα*. Athens 1974).